

For Example

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Well, I never get tired of opening the word of God to study it, and I never get tired of opening the word of God to be able to teach it, especially to you, especially in this context of Truth Community Church. So grateful to the Lord that his mercies are new every morning, his love endures forever, his lovingkindness is steadfast and his loyal love shall never end for his people, and so it's with a great sense of trust and optimism, a great sense of confidence in the future of what lies ahead that we turn to the word of God here this morning.

We come to a wonderful text nearing the end of chapter 3 in the book of Philippians and I would invite you to turn there with me. Philippians 3. I had planned to end the chapter in today's message but I'm going to split it into two and just cover the first three verses, 17 through 19, here today, and then on Tuesday cover verses 20 and 21. Let me just say a word about Tuesday's message. It will be titled "A Citizen's Hope," and there's no such thing as anything mandatory in the life of our church except for what the word of God clearly calls us and commands us to do or to avoid, but stopping short of saying it's mandatory, I really encourage you to be here Tuesday night for those two verses talking about citizenship in heaven and how we are waiting for Christ to return from heaven. It's a matter of utmost urgency in the times in which we live. If you can't be here in person, be sure to join it live over the live stream. This is a providentially timed text for the day in which we live and the Lord is going to use it greatly in the lives of those that hear. So that's Tuesday coming up. Had planned to just kind of rush through it at the end of today's message, said to myself this morning, "Uh-uh, we're not going to do it that way." We're going to take our time and go through it and that gives us time to benefit even more from these three verses that are in front of us here today, but these next couple of weeks, forget what's happening in the world around us and forget what's happening in our country, these next two or three weeks in the life of our church and in the texts that the Lord has providentially brought to us, not only the end of chapter 3 but looking ahead just a week or two, just kind of a preview of coming attractions, you might say, looking ahead to next Tuesday, I believe, I'm sorry, a week from Tuesday, we're going to be looking at this text on the 19th on the eve of the inauguration. Look at this text with me where it says in Philippians 4:6, I'm preaching ahead three weeks. This is crazy but it's all necessary. It's important for you to be motivated to pay attention to your spiritual life in these next couple of weeks and to understand what God in his gracious provision for his church has lying just ahead for us in the midst of the turmoil in which we are living. We'll

be looking a week from Tuesday at this text where it says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." So on this coming Tuesday, we're going to see about our citizenship in heaven, that following Tuesday we're going to be seeing that familiar text, "Be anxious for nothing," and the call of God through his word on our individual lives, on your lives and on mine in these coming days is going to respond to the clear commands of his word, the clear teaching of his word, and to trust Christ for whatever lies ahead. There is no reason for fear. There is no reason for anyone to be upset about current events and what's going on because we do not start our thinking as believers from what's happening in the world around us. We begin our thinking with what the word of God says. We begin our thinking, we begin our entire approach to everything in life through what it says about what God has done for his children and what he has promised to do for them.

Now if God has saved us in Christ, if God has promised to send Christ again, if Christ is going to literally transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory and we say we believe that, if we say we believe that, then it has to fundamentally alter the way that we approach the world compared to everyone else around us. This applies on individual hardship that many of you are going through, and I say sympathetically and softly this will help you as well. But as I look at what is dominating conversation in so-called Christian circles on social media and things like this, beloved, I want to tell you so many people are so worried about what's happening, I'm concerned about something completely different, I'm concerned about Christians being eclipsed in their thinking by the pressing matter of things today that will be ultimately forgotten tomorrow and losing sight of the very clear things that God has said to us in his word, and there is no excuse for that. There is no excuse for Christians who know Christ and Christians who have the word of God in their hands to be like that. There's no excuse for that whatsoever.

Look at it here with me, look at it again. I want to press this point home. We'll get to today's text soon enough. "Our citizenship," chapter 3, verse 20, "is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory." Now look, if that is your future and it is guaranteed and certain to you, don't you think that that should shape the way that you view everything else? If that is the ultimate and final reality, doesn't it inform everything else that is transient and passing in between?

And look at chapter 4, verse 4, where in light of these great truths of Christ it says, "Rejoice in the Lord always." "But you don't know what's happening." No. No, Paul says, "No, again I will say, rejoice!" He repeats it for the sake of emphasis. "Rejoice. I'll say it again, rejoice and rejoice in the Lord." If you are in the sphere of the Lord, if you have been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, if your sins are forgiven, if you are in union with Christ, if he has justified you and he is sanctifying you and he will one day glorify you, how can your response to life be anything other than this joy unspeakable and full of glory?

Look over at 1 Peter. Look, I'm animated because I know that some of you really need to hear this and some of you need to really have a fundamental shift in your thinking and your approach to life. 1 Peter 1:6. And I say these things not because I'm upset with you, I say them because I love you and care for you and want you to live in the fullness and manifest the glory that we should be reflecting back to the Christ who has so gloriously saved us. 1 Peter 1:6, you know, which comes right after verse 5, you "are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." You're protected, beloved. Our protection was never going to come from government leaders of any stripe, of any party. That was always going to be a foolish place for anyone to place their trust. Verse 6, "In this you greatly rejoice." In what do I greatly rejoice? Rejoice in the Lord always. Rejoice in the fact that you're protected by the power of God, that Christ has caused us by his great mercy, verse 3, "to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." You're protected in that and because you are in Christ and because you are protected by him, verse 6, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials," sure there's trials, sure they're distressing, but they're temporary, they're passing, and you can rejoice in the midst of them, indeed you are commanded to again and again to do so, "so that," verse 7, "the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

When Peter wrote this, or shortly thereafter, Christians were literally being tested by literal fire as the demented emperor Nero blamed Christians for the burning of Rome when he had probably set that fire himself, and shifting the focus away from his own failures of leadership, blamed it on the Christians and then started to persecute them in the most heinous of ways. He would literally crucify them, hang them on a cross in his garden. He would encase them in wax and set them on fire to light his garden, and he made sport of like-minded believers like us. They were people, in one sense, just like us, people of no name, of humble origin, and they were suffering under literal flames of fire at the hands of a demented leader. So they were literally being tested by fire. There's nothing like that happening to us right now.

So the question that is begging to be answered by the lives of Christian people just like you is whether you are going to rejoice in the Lord regardless of what comes about in the days ahead, whether you are going to trust him and put aside and let that trust drive out anxiety and anger that you may have over what you see going on in the world around you. That's the question that is going to be answered. You know, people think that this is all a big test for our country. Well, for Christians the test for us is how we are going to respond in faith and whether we will respond in faith and by faith to these things or not, and whether we will be confident in the Lord or whether we will fear political leaders more than we fear Christ, stated differently, whether we will fear political leaders more than we will trust in the crucified and risen Lord.

You know, are we going to fear, are you going to fear and be angry about events that are happening around you to the utter exclusion in your mind of the fact that Jesus Christ is

risen from the dead, he is ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, at the highest place of authority in all of the universe where he will live and reign forever, are you going to dismiss that and fear men and women whose breath is in their nostrils and who will be in the grave soon enough and soon enough forgotten? Do any of you have any idea who the Speaker of the House was 60 years ago? Do you have any idea who the Speaker of the House was 50 years ago? These people come and go. They're forgotten soon enough, and yet Christians and the church today and on social media and in people that we know and people that have broader, more prominent or better men of God than I am are just preoccupied with this stuff and I just think that that's a terrible betrayal of our Lord. I think it's a terrible betrayal of our Lord for Christians to respond in such fear and anger and anxiety and acting like the end of the world has come. Look, we read what the end of the world looks like at the end of Matthew 24 when the heavenly bodies fall out of the sky. That will be the end of the world. This isn't that.

So what we, what you and I have to do is we have to remind ourselves of the fundamental basics of what it is that we believe and what the consequences of that are. We have put our trust in the crucified, risen and ascended Christ. He is at the place of ultimate authority and the hands and the actions of kings and princes are in his hand and under his authority, and it's no problem for him to raise up men and cast them down, it's no problem to frustrate their plans. He has a purpose and he is working out a purpose in absolutely everything that happens and you know that. If you have been at this church for any length of time, you know that from God's word. You should be able to look at specific passages of Scripture from your memory and remind yourself of these things. Well, if you know that and you believe them and you have entrusted your soul to Christ, then all of these other things come as a matter of consequence. Be anxious for nothing. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice. We eagerly await for the coming of Christ. Our hope was never in this world.

So, you know, what you thought was the challenge about, you know, what's happening in these days in which we live, the challenge is never what is presented to you by secular media or by, you know, the prevalent mind of, you know, the broader Evangelical church. The challenge for you, the issue for you, what lies ahead for you is whether you will respond in faith to Christ in these times or not. And for some of you, the jury is out on what that's going to look like and I call you away from your anger and anxiety over these things to trust in the Christ that you say that you believe and to live accordingly, because that's the only way for a Christian to respond to life no matter what happens. So in one sense, in one sense we can look at the situation about us and we can embrace it and say, "You know, as for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord. As for me and my house, we're going to trust the Lord, and we're going to be satisfied in Christ even if there's nothing in life to satisfy us by what's happening in this passing life."

You know, as I say, I say many times on social media, the thing that I want more than anything, the reason that I exist is to help Christians think like Christians. That's all I want. That's all I want for you. I want you to think like Christians and live accordingly. That's what the call of the Bible is on the people of God, and if you are just utterly overwhelmed in fear, maybe, my friend, maybe you're not in Christ and your fearful

heart, your angry heart is explained by the fact that you don't really know the Prince of Peace, you don't really know the one who came to love and sacrifice himself for his people and to pay for their sins on the cross. Maybe that explains the utter despair that some people are expressing these days. I don't know. All I can do is explain it to you and then appeal to you to call out to Christ to make it plain in your own heart and for Christ to sort these things out, and for Christ to do a work deep in your heart by the power of his Holy Spirit that these things become the living reality off which you feed, that Christ becomes your bread in the days to come, Christ becomes your drink in the days to come and you are so satisfied in Christ that everything else pales by utter comparison. That's what Christian living is like and we have the opportunity to manifest that in the days to come when perhaps some of the things on which some of us were relying have been taken away. Christ hasn't been taken away and therefore we can rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say rejoice. We can be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make our request known to him. That's what Christians do. That's the way Christians think and it's right there on the plain surface of Scripture, this is what we are to do, and I call you to that, I call you to the word of God, and I call you to reject the voices of those who would call you away from that into a spirit of fear and anxiety and anger about what lies ahead. I call you away from that and into these things that are on the plain surface of Scripture, and it is a great providential gift from God that these are the passages that are in front of us at such a time like this.

So with that said, let's look at the text here again, verses 17 to 19, our text for today. Philippians 3, beginning in verse 17. Paul as he was entering into this portion of his letter, had just told the Philippians to aim for a spiritual standard that he was setting for them. He had said in verse 13, "I'm forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." He says, "Yes, I'm in chains here, I'm chained to a Roman soldier, I'm in a Roman prison, I'm a prisoner of the Lord here. Yes, I do not have freedom of movement here. Yes, there are people outside the cell that are preaching in a way trying to bring me distress in my imprisonment. Yes, all of that's true but I've set all of that aside. The thing that occupies my attention here is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." And he calls everyone else to join him, including, by extension, us today. Verse 15, "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained." So God has given us in the 21st century in this time, God has given us a time of great instability to expose our inner attitudes toward the things that we say that we believe.

Now what Paul does here building on that spiritual standard that he has called people to, is he sets before them a contrast to help them move toward the goal that he is calling them to, that goal of Christ-likeness, that goal of exclusive focus and affection upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and you'll see it here in these three verses. Verse 17,

17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. 18 For many walk, [many] of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are

enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

And we let that last clause just kind of hang in the air there for just a moment, to just echo and reverberate off the walls in terms of helping us grasp somehow through whatever means the Lord might use, to grasp what is a mark of an enemy of the cross of Christ, their mind is set on earthly things, and let that shape us and condition us as we look to the text here.

Paul gives us a contrast in this text to help us move toward the goal of Christ-likeness. He gives us two examples. He gives us the faithful example of himself and others like him, and he gives us the false example of the apostates who had abandoned the faith. So we're going to look at a contrast here today in these three verses, looking, first of all, at the faithful example of Paul, and as we're going to see as we go through the text here today, is that one of the ways that we grow in Christ and one of the ways that God has appointed for us to grow in our sanctification, in our Christ-likeness, is that we need examples in order to follow. Imitation of a good example is a biblical way to find spiritual growth.

Look at verse 17 with me here as we consider the faithful example of Paul. Verse 17, "Brethren." You've got the love the affectionate way that he addresses his readers here and this is the affectionate perspective of Christ toward his people. He's not ashamed to call us brethren, and so through his word he comes and he sympathetically calls us and exhorts us to what follows.

"Brethren, join in following my example." Paul says, "join in following my example." The idea in the original language is this, "Be imitators of me." Paul tells them, "You see my life, imitate me. Be like I am." The idea as he writes to this church at Philippi is that if they follow the example of Paul and those who are like Paul, they will escape the snare of false teachers. If they follow the example of Paul and adopt the mindset of Paul that he has expressed earlier, then they are going to grow in their sanctification and they will escape the snare of the devil.

Now the Apostle Paul was a model. He was an exemplary example of the pursuit of Christ-likeness, and he had just outlined it earlier in this passage. What is it that the pursuit of Christ-likeness looks like? What's the mindset behind it? Well, let me just give you a little bit of review here really quickly. Paul had forsaken any claim to a righteousness of his own and was relying entirely and exclusively on the righteousness of Christ for his righteousness before God.

Look at verse 9, he says, "I want to be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law," so he has forsaken and repented of self-righteousness and in its place his faith is in Christ. He is relying on the righteousness of Christ alone in order to satisfy the demands of God. "Nothing of myself. I'm relying on Christ and on Christ alone." And that has had a sanctifying effect on his desires and what his condition and state of mind is now as a believer.

In verse 10 from that position of repentance of self-righteousness and embracing by faith the righteousness of Christ, now he's had this transforming effect on his heart and his desire is, "I want to know Him. I want to know Christ more. I want to know Him experientially. I want to know Him in the depths of my heart and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." What Paul is saying here is, "I have forsaken self-righteousness and my supreme desire, the highest pinnacle of the aspirations of my heart is that I want to know Christ like this." And the outcome of that, his final focus, his ultimate focus is what lies after this life.

In verse 11, "that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." So we see something of what it is to Paul to desire Christ and to live as a Christian and what the affections of his heart were.

Verse 14, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." I've forgotten what lies behind, I'm reaching forward to what lies ahead.

Now beloved, whether it's the events in the world around us or whether it's the events in your personal life that trouble you and distract you, in all of that, my friends, in all of that, my brothers and sisters in Christ, in all of that there is something higher and loftier that beckons your heart. In all of that Christ is, should be, and can be supreme in your affections and you can find your satisfaction in him. "I'm satisfied in Christ. Whether the world feeds that satisfaction or tries to drain it, I'm ultimately," the Christian says to himself, "I'm satisfied with Him. The Lord Jesus Christ loved me and gave Himself for me. The Lord Jesus Christ is with me and will protect me from all evil. I fear no evil for You are with me," Psalm 23:4, "and so I'm resting, resting, Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of that thou art. I am finding out the greatness of thy loving heart," as the hymnwriter said. So we see this preminent focus on Christ and Paul says, "That's what you're to follow. That's the example that I want you to follow."

Now understand something here. Paul is not being a proud man as he calls his readers to follow his example. He wasn't the only example that he's talked about in this letter. Earlier at the end of chapter 2, he had held up Timothy as an example to them. In another place just after that section, he had held up Epaphroditus as a man of service that they could model their lives after. And so he's not being proud or self-centered here. His example is only worthwhile because it's an example that is fully centered on the Lord Jesus Christ like that of Timothy, like that of Epaphroditus. So what we have here in the 21st century, what we have here looking back 2,000 years ago is a man who is in prison, who was facing death at the hands of a corrupt government and a very wicked leader, a man saying, "I'm satisfied with Christ. I forget everything else. That's what my mind is set on." And then he says, "Okay, I want you to follow my example."

Now as we're going to see in just a moment here, there's something important for you and I to learn from that and it's humbling, and it's a very very necessary point of humiliation for us to embrace in the course of our spiritual lives and it is this: you and I, we do not intuitively know how to live the Christian life. You and I, we do not know intuitively

what it means to have our focus set exclusively on Christ. We're born again out of a pagan lifestyle, out of pagan philosophies and worldly, ungodly thinking and sinful patterns and Christ saves us out of that and delivers us from the power of sin and the power of Satan and gives us new life. We've been given this wonderful gift and we need to know what to do with it, and the structure of God in this is for us to enter into a body of believers where there are examples like that of people who are ahead of you and you say, "I can look at them and I can see what to do." Your sanctification will come, in part, by seeing good examples of Christian living happening around you, in flesh and blood examples of those around you.

And you know, there's very little hope, there's very little hope for people who consciously and intentionally or negligently separate themselves from the body of Christ, separate themselves from believers and just think that they can just live kind of the Christian life on their own power and on their own understanding, you know, and listen to certain preachers on SermonAudio or whatever and thrive and prosper by that. That's not the pattern of God. The pattern of God is for you to be in the midst of a body of believers, a group of believers where there are multiple examples and multiple godly people that are weighing influence on your life. That's why it's so good and so important for you to be here this morning; you're showing something of an understanding that the gathering of believers is important and to just separate yourself from the body of Christ for months on end without any kind of involvement, beloved, this is being very far off track. And I know something about being off track. I've gotten lost many times driving in California. I actually got our van stuck in a sand dune off of I5 between Las Vegas and Los Angeles because I was trying to take a shortcut, and it was really foolish of the shortcut that I took. I got off the established path and I got onto this dirt road and it turned into sand in 120 degree heat and we were stranded and couldn't get out. And this was not quite before the days of cellphones but it was bad enough as it was, and so we suffered there for hours in the heat waiting for somebody to show up and help us. Eventually they did, as you can see by the fact that I stand here. But what's going to happen to people that try to separate themselves from the body of Christ and live it on their own, is it's disobedient to the word of God and it's going to mire them in spiritual quicksand in a way that cannot lead to anything good.

And the New Testament often emphasizes this point, this importance of examples. Look at two books, 1 Corinthians and Hebrews. So keep your finger in Philippians, we'll get back there soon enough. In 1 Corinthians 4:16, Paul writing to the church at Corinth says in verse 14, he says, "I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children." He's writing in a spirit of love in everything that he says, even when he's rebuking and correcting them. And he says to Corinth, "if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me." Imitate me. And he goes on to say in verse 17, "For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church." Paul says, "My dear children, imitate me. Look at my life. Look at my affections and set your pattern, set your life, set your desires to be like that." To be like Paul. To be like this leader, the one

who led them to Christ and established them in Christ. Paul says, "Imitate me." And the reason he said that was because they needed something to emulate, they needed something to say, "Oh, so that's how it's done. That's what it looks like. That's how the man of God thinks." And Timothy was going to be there to reinforce the matter.

Look at chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians where he repeats this and he says, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." His example was reliable because he was imitating Christ himself. And so Christ was Paul's example, Paul was to become their example, and by following the example of Paul who was following Christ, they would grow in their sanctification and become the kinds of Christians that they were supposed to be.

Look at the book of Hebrews 6:11. The writer of Hebrews says, "we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

Then in chapter 11, you don't need to turn there but in chapter 11 he gives them a long list of people who had lived by faith and whose examples could be considered and imitated in what their growth was to look like.

Finally in chapter 13, verse 7 the writer of Hebrews says, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." We're to imitate those who have gone before us. We're to imitate the examples, the godly examples that God has laid before us. As we look back in church history, as we live with each other in the body of Christ, the idea is this, beloved, the idea is this, is to find those men and women who model godly attitudes and behavior and faithfulness to Christ. Find examples like that and observe them and adopt their approach to life as your own. This is part of the way that a church provides discipleship to its people and it's one of the reasons that our pattern and our philosophy here at Truth Community Church is that we are doing everything that is humanly possible to keep everybody gathered together, gathered together in one room, in one service, at one time, so that the youngest people in the congregation have a cross-generational example to look up and to find and to emulate so that over time there are examples that are set forth for a body to follow and emulate.

Here's what you need to understand, beloved, and I try to preach in a way that emphasizes this point, whether I've done a good job or not, the Lord will tell me one day. Christian growth is more than simply an acquisition of knowledge. It is more than simply gathering biblical data into your mind and being right about doctrine or being right about this or that, and it's certainly far more than being right about your view on end times. There's just a whole lot more than facts and mental acquisition of knowledge that is involved.

Look at 1 Corinthians 13, you know, just to make sure that you understand that I'm not making this up. 1 Corinthians 13:2, "If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains," I've got

it all, I've got all the knowledge, I've got all the faith, "but if it's without love, I am nothing." Scripture says knowledge makes arrogant but love edifies.

So what you and I have to understand is that there is more than simply acquiring knowledge. A man cannot rightly and successfully live the Christian life in seclusion by himself. It requires involvement in a local body of believers where you can observe people who are ahead of you in the race and learn to follow them. The idea here in Philippians is to pay special attention to them, and the idea that a healthy congregation gives a collective example in which this following and imitation can take place.

Look back at Philippians 3 with me again. There's a plurality. Paul says, "Follow my example," but it's not singular. There's a plurality in the call here because he goes on and he says, "and observe those," observe those, "who walk according to the pattern that you have in us." The walk is referring to the pattern of their conduct in life, and what a healthy body does, and there are lots of people within the walls of Truth Community Church who can do this for you, who are doing this without even thinking or trying to do it, they are giving you a living picture of what the form of Christian life looks like. Those of you that are struggling with hardship in your family and hardship in your marriage, there are people who have walked that path and come out well on the other side. These are people that can come alongside you and help and encourage you. Those of you who are young people trying to make decisions about the course of life that you should take, there are people who have made life decisions and career choices that can give you an idea of what that should look like. And on and on the examples go, and we just find that there are all kinds of people who have been faithful to Christ in different circumstances and collectively we have an example of those.

This is what it looks like for those who walk with Christ and that's why it's so important, it's so important for you to be a living, active, consistent, consistent part of the body of Christ. Whether it's here or someplace else, the power of example comes as exhibited over time. And you know, you see somebody that's been walking with Christ and their life is going well and then tragedy hits and cancer comes to them, or an accident comes to them, and you get to see how they respond to it, and the power of that example is crucial for growing in Christ. This is what the walk looks like and so we all need that. We all need the benefit of that and it's part of the reason that God and Christ established the church like they did. It's not the only reason but it's an integral part of it all.

Now let me say one other thing and keeping in mind the things that I said earlier at the beginning of this message. I love the timing of all of this and the presence of the Lord with us as we open his word. There's something, it's not just a matter of looking for an example, that's part of it but there's something else that each one of you need to understand, those of you that claim to know Christ, and especially those of you that are members here at Truth Community Church. This idea of imitation and being an example, it's not simply for you to look ahead and look for people who can help you by their example, this emphasis in Scripture obviously and implicitly means that you are to become and to be an example of godliness at your own stage of life in Christian maturity because people are watching you. Young people are watching you and, you know, and

what do they see? What do they see? For some, for many of you they see people who are earnest about their Christian walk and I thank God for that, but just going with the two A words that I've been using here, it should trouble you for the sake of others if it won't for the sake of your own heart, it should trouble you to contemplate the fact that if you're living an anxious or angry life over earthly events, that that's the kind of example that you're setting for the people of God around you, what you're setting in your family. You know, people take their cues about what Christian life looks like from what they see in part.

So this idea of an example, we look and we see the example of Paul, we look and see the good examples of those that have gone before us in Scripture and in church history and there's just so much for us to say, "That's what I need to be like." Not only do I need to be like that, the one who is truly born again, truly regenerate in his heart, the one who is truly born again says, "I want to be like that. I don't want to live a life that is squandered on earthly considerations and earthly pursuits and earthly affections. I don't want that. I don't want to waste my life in sin. I don't want people to think that becoming a Christian means that you live angry when you don't get what you want in life or in culture or in social political things. I don't want to be like that."

So Scripture here, look at verse 17 with me again as the word of God speaks to us with fresh power this morning in light of all of the things that we've said here today, with fresh power the word of God speaks directly to your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit this morning and says, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." Look to Paul, see what Paul did, see the examples in Scripture, look in the congregation around you and find the people that are striving for and somehow exemplifying the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. And go after them. And you young people, you young people need to find, seriously, seriously, you young people need to find your example not in the worldly circle of your peers but to look for godly examples and let that set the standard and the path for you rather than just getting meshed up in the ungodly carnality that often marks unregenerate youth. And look, that's not going to happen by a group consensus that we're all going to do this. You're probably going to have to make that decision on your own, say, "That's what I want and I'm content to lose friends, I'm content to be outside the circle of the cool people, I'm content for that because I want Christ even as a young person." And I know that we have young people like that and young people that are pursuing that and I thank God for every one of you. We need your example, not just the example of the old people too. Do you know what our church needs? What our church needs? What our church needs is young people in their teens, young people in their early 20s, newly married, people saying, "This is what I want. This is the example that I want to set." That's what we need. We welcome, embrace and call all that would fall into those kinds of categories, welcome those and embrace those and encourage those who say, "I may be young but that's what I want too. I'll be an example and I'll follow an example." So this has something to say to every one of us, no doubt about it.

Now Paul having set forth this exhortation to follow his true example, his faithful example, now he enforces, you might say, his exhortation by giving a negative contrast with those of a different example. A different example, and that brings us to point 2 here today: the false example of the apostates. The false example of the apostates and, beloved, you know, look, we've got to think with discernment in order to choose our examples well because there are a lot of counter examples out there. There are a lot of counter examples out there and we need to be aware of them and it was no different 2,000 years ago. Paul reminds the Philippians about his prior warnings to them and he warns them about seeking after the wrong examples that will lead them astray, and so in verse 18 he says, "For many walk." He says and the flow of the thought is this, "Follow my example and those who walk according to the pattern you have in us, do that for, do it because, do it for this reason, on this account."

Why is it so important to think about the example and choose your examples well? Why is that so vital and important for your spiritual life? It's because, verse 18, there are many who walk in a different pattern, who do something different and you can't go after them without great danger to your soul. Paul says, "You need to follow my example because there are many that walk, of whom I often told you." He's looking back to the time when he was ministering in their presence personally. While he was there, he was telling them again and again, he told them repeatedly that there was spiritual danger, there were things and people and teachers to avoid.

So verse 18, "many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, their end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things." Paul's pattern, Paul's call to follow the good example was crucial. It was crucial because the bad examples were so abundant all around them and it broke his heart.

Look at it. He says in verse 18, "many walk," and he says, "of whom I often told you," I told you about this in the past and now I'm telling you again, and look at his attitude toward it. He says, "I tell you now even weeping," tears were streaming down his face at this point in his letter as he remembered those who started on the path but abandoned it, who looked like examples at one point but actually were not. They had proven that they were not Christians at all. There had been people in the midst of the body at Philippi who had turned against Paul, had turned against Christ, and their teaching and their conduct manifested the fact that they were enemies of Christ all along.

They were not believers. He makes this very plain. Look at it there at verse 18, "they are enemies of the cross of Christ, and their end is destruction." Despite, beloved, despite their prior claim to faith, they had never been born again and Scripture tells us that there are many on that dangerous path. Jesus said, Matthew 7, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord.'" The Apostle John 2:19, "They went out from us but they were not really of us, for if they had been of us they would have remained with us but they went out so that it would be shown that they all are not of us." With us for a time in that apostolic circle in the first century, with us for a time, had the outward appearance of Christ, but not the inward possession of the reality.

As I said, I think, within the past week whether it was Sunday or Tuesday doesn't matter, beloved, and in light of everything that we've said here today, this is all woven together like one tapestry, this all fits together and I just remind you weeping in my heart though not with my eyes unfortunately, I remind you that false conversion is really a thing. There will be people claiming to know Christ today who will end up in hell because they did not possess the inward reality of Christ. They had not really become a new creation. They had added on some kind of external spirituality to their present condition without a real, genuine, profound, inward repentance by which they rejected the world, reject their own self-righteousness, reject sin, and in its place embrace the Lordship of Christ, embrace the idea of being his disciple, embrace the idea of living for Christ and living for the world to come rather than with a focus and preoccupation on the here and now and in the world of this life. And that's how people end up in hell thinking that they were going to heaven. There was never a genuine repentance in their heart by which they had forsaken everything as Paul did and embraced Christ. You see, if they were looking at the example of Paul, they would have seen from verse 9, for example, what forsaking righteousness looks like and what the product of that is. "I want to know Christ and that's all I care about. That's my one noble ambition. That's the pursuit of my life."

Well, these other examples that Paul is alluding to gave them something completely different. Look at it there in verse 19. Their god, their primary focus was on their carnal desires, their appetite. The things that they boasted in were the things that they should have been ashamed of. Their false teaching, their worldly living, they set their minds on earthly things. The outcome for these ungodly people is destruction. Paul says they will experience eternal destruction for their sin. I've said it many many times, look for my message "Jesus on Hell," hell is real according to Jesus, hell is eternal according to Jesus, hell is painful according to Jesus, and it does us no good to try to diminish those realities, to ignore them or to marginalize them. This is why salvation is essential. This is why you need to choose good examples because in a godly example you will see a focus on eternal things, a focus on Christ that continually lays before you the reality of what the Christian life is looking like, and as you embrace that and are following that, you are reassured and established in your salvation. Without that, you start to look at what other people are talking about and you think that, you know, social and political engagement is the path of the righteous and I just collapse in worry of people that go down that road because it's setting their minds on earthly things rather than on Christ.

And I realize, you know, I realize the great danger of self-deception because in Christian circles it will be cloaked in doing this, focusing on earthly things in the name of Christ. That's why it's so important for you to be in the word of God on your own. It's so important for you to consistently be under the teaching of the word of God. It's not about keeping the attendance numbers up, it's because there are eternal matters at stake. You are easily deceived and easily led astray and some of you are no doubt like I was, living in the midst of a false conversion, thinking you're in Christ when you're not and being around godly examples and godly influences has a way of exposing that in your life.

Commentators aren't entirely sure who Paul had in mind here, maybe it was Jewish legalists that focused on external ritual, you know, find a lot of that in Catholic places. Other people, other commentators believe Paul has in mind different influences as he's talking about this. The language fits professing Christians who were living sensual lives. Paul, remember, had said that, "My desire is to know Him and the power of His resurrection," verse 10. "I forget what lies behind. I'm pressing on to the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." What Paul is describing here in verse 19 is people who had no regard for holiness. They lived for material and sensual pursuits to please their flesh, and the things in which they exalted were actually shameful. And with the example of Paul in mind, the contrast with these apostates is clear. Paul says, "The one thing I care about, sanctification and knowing Christ. These apostates, living for the things of the flesh." They had no desire for that sanctification. Paul had denied himself to take up the cross and follow Christ, these apostates had no desire for that. They were following after their worldly lusts. Paul's goal, "I want to know Christ, be found in Him." Their goal was to fulfill self and the contrast is clear.

Whatever else, whatever else, beloved, these false teachers and false Christians may say about Christ and Scripture, whatever else they say about it, their life and their emphasis shows that they love the here and now, they love the things of this passing world. That's what they are preoccupied with. We don't need to name names here. The principles are clear and all I can do, beloved, as I close here, all I can do is commend these truths to you and call you, warn you, beg you, plead with you, ask you, whatever verb will engender a response in your soul, to take heed, to pay attention particularly in a time and day like this because the professing church of Christ is filled with such people, and in part, you recognize them not by what they say but what they don't say. The emphasis that they don't make. The emphasis of forsaking self-righteousness and embracing Christ alone. The emphasis on a spiritual aspiration that is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. A focus and a hope set on heaven and the resurrection from the dead. It's when they're not talking about that that your radar needs to be going off and pulsating and saying, "Maybe I need a different example. Maybe I need to look someplace else."

And beloved, I smile so that I don't weep. Beloved, I am not overstating the case, I am not overstating the danger, I am not making a mountain out of a molehill here this morning. Look at the text itself. Paul said in chapter 3, verse 18, many walk. Many walk that are actually enemies of the cross of Christ. Somewhere in this broad circle of outward, professing, Evangelical Christianity, there are many people like this and it is urgent for you to look up to Christ in this moment and pray, "God, deliver me from such a fate as that. God, bring Your word clear to my mind and to my heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. Have mercy on me the sinner. God, if there is sin in my life, I forsake it for the sake of Christ. Have mercy on me the sinner," you unregenerate ones can say. And those of you that have been living a carnal, anxious, angry, Christian life, so-called Christian life, to call out to Christ and in like spirit say, "God, Lord Jesus, have mercy on my soul! Thank You for showing me these things from Your word and awakening my heart. Help me, help me by the power of the Holy Spirit because I'm lost here and I don't know my way out."

A man or a woman's lifestyle ultimately reveals the reality of their faith. Time and truth go hand-in-hand. We are living in a time that is exposing what people really love and what they really believe and the call for you is to be pursuing after and to becoming someone like Paul, "I want to be found in Him. My desire is to know Him no matter what else anyone else does." Beloved, what does your life say about your faith? What does the condition of your heart say about what you really love? Answer well. There are some who are following that are like Paul. Scripture tells us there are many who don't. May the Spirit of God help you be numbered among those who truly love and know Christ by faith.

Let's pray together.

Dear Father, help us to count all things as loss for the sake of Christ. Help us to appreciate the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord even if it brings suffering, the loss of other things. Father, help us to count such things as such rubbish for the sake of knowing our crucified, resurrected, ascended, and one day coming Lord Jesus. We pray in His name. Amen.

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